



Episode 003—Allyship

Welcome! You're listening to Adopted into Allyship, a podcast about loving one another wholeheartedly and fighting for connection. I'm Jamie K Corbin and this is episode three, Allyship.

This is the final episode of a three part mini-series meant to provide context for what you can expect here on the Adopted Into Allyship podcast. Before we get started, I just want to offer a loving reminder that conversations around adoption and allyship are nuanced and sensitive, and what follows may be hard to hear if you are connected to adoption. Today, this is especially true if you are connected to transracial adoption. Please enter this space with grace and care for yourself and those around you.

If you haven't listened to the first two episodes in this series, I would encourage you to hit pause and check them out before continuing on here.

In this episode we are going to attempt to solve the puzzle about what to do with the grief and tension we find in our adoptions. My suggestion is allyship. Allyship is a simple solution, but definitely not an easy one. Allyship takes a lot of humility, a lot of personal reflection, and a lot of fighting off shame when you fail. And that's where we will start, with one of the biggest failures in my own allyship journey.

It took me years to share publicly about an experience I had as a summer intern in Chicago and to this day my stomach still gets upset when I think about it. The summer before my senior year at Miami University I had been selected for an amazing internship program. I had the option to work in Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, or Chicago and I chose Chicago because I had visited a couple of times for the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute with the Latino student organization and loved everything about it. Also, I knew I could survive without a car.

I did not make my decision based on the cost of living, which is what led me into a desperate search for affordable housing that eventually landed me in a housing cooperative within walking distance to the train. For those of you who don't know, because I sure didn't, a housing cooperative is a larger house with a random collection of roommates who all agree to take on household responsibilities more like a family would. Rent was inexpensive (I paid \$200 a month for my basement bedroom that only flooded twice while I was there) and the food, which was vegetarian, was included in the cost of rent.

I lived with a diverse cast of characters, but most of us spoke Spanish and were connected by our work to serve the community, which was predominantly Latinx. Three housemates were less than ten years older than I was, and two of them were a couple that shared the room across the hall from me. She was a white American, who was incredibly fluent in Spanish and led a rock band that practiced in our basement a couple times a week and he was an artist from Mexico, where he learned to create beautiful handmade jewelry. Both of them were very generous with their time and helped me improve my Spanish and learn how to cook vegetarian meals.

One night we decided that we were hungry for meat and set off for a late-night taco run. Tacos were the most affordable, fastest, and delicious way to supplement the cost-effective vegetarian meals that sometimes didn't quite convince the carnivores of the group that we had completed an entire meal. We walked to the neighborhood taqueria, ordered our food and sat down at a picnic table to enjoy the delicious and messy al pastor and carne asada tacos we had ordered – some of us with extra fire-like hot sauce and one of us definitely not.

When I think back on that night I think about the laughing and the smiles, the warmth that comes from friendship whether it's new or old, and the gratitude I felt for being so welcomed into a familial like unit even though I was a stranger when I showed up on their doorstep for my interview. I remember the good feelings, almost like a strengthening, that came from being around people who shared similar ideals as me – who cared about racial justice like I did, who valued the community over the individual like I did, who saw the world we lived in as falling short of honoring humanity and were doing their parts to make it a better place for everyone. It was like being able to breathe and be myself without risk of judgment or damnation, which was **not** what I had experienced on Miami's campus.

I think this sense of appreciation, belonging, and camaraderie is what makes the next part of the story so gut-wrenchingly difficult to tell.

I might not have known about the cost of living in Chicago (did I mention that sales tax was 9.5% that summer) but I was totally aware that Chicago's police department was notorious for being one of the most violent and racist police departments in our country. I was also aware that in 2006, the anti-immigrant sentiment was much more intense in the Midwest than I had experienced at home in Idaho. So, the first time the police officer drove past us, my guard was up, even though we were doing nothing wrong.

Let me pause the story for a second and just explain a little bit about 2006 Jamie for a moment. I had taken several courses on politics, economics, foreign policy, border issues, social problems – some of them honors level - and my over-confidence in my understanding of the world, paired with my lack of awareness of my own privilege and my "strong" personality as my parents have called it my entire life were a recipe for disaster. All of this came together that night at the taqueria in an interaction with the police and in just seconds the situation became what would be one of my biggest regrets, a small miracle, and a life-long lesson about allyship.

Okay, so unpause the story. Here we are, myself and two of my housemates, attending to our carnivorous cravings and having a good laugh at my inability to tolerate liquid fire on my tacos. We were just being people, but we were being people at the wrong place, at the wrong time, in the wrong language, and apparently for one of us, with the wrong-colored skin, at least in the opinion of the police officer who had circled around a second time and had made a point to roll down his passenger side window and stare closely at us as he drove by. At the time I was unaware of my own attachment disorder and the fact that I pretty much existed my entire life in a fight or flight state, so when the officer drove by for a third time, even slower and with his intent stare becoming a hateful glare, my brain chose fight.

“What’s your problem?” I yelled toward the police car, as I stood up ready to tell him how his actions could be construed as racial profiling. But I don’t even think I even got my legs untangled from the bench and the picnic table.

It all happened so quickly, and my shame was so great after the fact that I don’t even remember how we avoided the police officer getting out of the car to question us or the walk home that night.

All I remember was the hiss in my friend’s voice as she grabbed my shoulder and reprimanded me for being so stupid. Only two of us were legal citizens, she reminded me, and an interaction with police could mean deportation for the other.

You can become aware of how much you don’t know in just a moment. We didn’t stay at the picnic table; I remember that part. Staying for the officer’s fourth pass around the block was not a choice, but I don’t remember walking home. I do remember feeling the anger, the fear, and the shame that swirled around us, the silence as we walked down the stairs and into our own separate rooms, my nausea and the tears I cried as quietly as I could once I was alone.

I remember the embarrassed apology I offered both of them the next morning, which they graciously accepted. And I remember the pain that existed between all of us from that point on, because you can never undo that kind of thing, you can never fully forget the feelings that invade your person when you witness an act of racial injustice —all you can do is choose what do with them.

If you had asked me before that horrible experience at the taqueria if I was my housemate’s ally, I would have asked if you were joking.

Of course I was an ally. I was friends with Latinos, I had taken several Latin American Studies courses, spoke good enough Spanish, had an abundance of compassion towards immigrants and issues at the border, and I myself am Mexican American...how could I ***not*** be an ally?

Well, obviously, I found a way.

I was not, in any sense of the word, an ally for my housemate, whose immigration status left him vulnerable wherever he went. In fact, if “not an ally” were to be considered a neutral statement, I would argue that my obliviousness in the situation, and how I acted in assumption of my allyship, was worse than neutral – it was dangerous. It inflicted harm. Not only had I risked my friend’s deportation with my quick-to-speak approach to confronting obvious racism (spoiler alert: that’s not how allyship works), I had also brought shame to him for his status, or lack thereof, in our community.

It was the opposite of honoring. It was the opposite of advocacy. God forgive me, it was the opposite of loving.

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Let me say that again: People who assume they are allies are dangerous and they will cause harm, even if they don’t mean to.

That’s the bad news. The good news is that allyship can be learned, no matter how much or what kind of life experience you have. If you have a desire to step into the tension and fight for justice, if you want to let go of your own comfort and power to create opportunity for people who are different from you to have equitable access to comfort and power, you are ready to start becoming an ally.

Here’s an uncomfortable truth for you – allyship is earned. Now, I know that’s going to cause some people to throw their hands up in the air and shout about how grace is given and not earned, and that the gospel of Christ is not a works-based gospel. I get all of that, but I would encourage you to hear me out.

Assumed allyship is dangerous. There are few things more painful than thinking your friends are allies, only to find out they do not have the skills necessary to show up in your life as an ally when you need them.

It’s worth noting that there are many ways to define allyship, and people have different opinions about what the answers should be to all of the who, what, where, when, why questions of what it means to be an ally. The space around allyship, like so much of the rest of life, is messy.

Since I’m a big fan of clarity and transparency, let me share my take on how this podcast will talk about allyship.

I believe that while allyship is accessible to anyone, it is a sacred practice that requires an intentional choice which is ultimately worked out between an individual and God.

I believe allyship moves society forward into a more just, loving place – and it requires preparation and sacrifice.

I believe allyship is absolutely Biblical, and as such must be accompanied with an abundance of grace.

I believe that allies themselves do what it takes to become equipped, reliable, and action oriented.

The goal of Adopted into Allyship is to help us lean into our own adoption stories and leverage the tension between their grief and joy into the work of becoming the allies our broken world so desperately needs.

One of the ways that we can live into adoption and allyship is by maintaining steady, prayerful connection with our creator. It reminds us that we are his beloved children, whom he created for a purpose, and that He invites us to play a part in bringing forth healing and justice amidst a broken world. It is an honor to pray with and for you, now.

Father God,

We come to you desperate to understand and utilize the tension of what we have been adopted into and out of, what our babies have been adopted into and out of.

We thank you that you understand all the complicated nuances of in-between spaces, since you came for us as fully God and fully human.

We confess that this tension is uncomfortable and instinctively we want to deny it, avoid it, or ignore it by pretending it's anything else by smothering it in silver linings and toxic words of comparison espousing how it could be worse.

When we read your word and examine your love story, we see that we are not the only ones who have struggled in this type of tension. Moses, Ruth, and Esther come to mind as people who can see their stories in terms of what they were adopted into and out of, God help us follow in their footsteps and use the tension to find your healing, for your glory.

Father, show us how to use our pain as a catalyst to bring your kingdom more fully into the world around us.

In our brother Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Thank you for joining me for another episode of Adopted into Allyship, produced by Day Three Studios. It's an honor to be your ally as you push yourself to listen, learn, and love in a way that helps you become an equipped, reliable, and action-oriented ally.

If you found our talk today helpful or encouraging, I would be most grateful if you would take a minute and rate the podcast, leave a review, and share it with those you know who could benefit from joining us as we work toward loving one another wholeheartedly and fighting for connection. I will be back with more next Thursday, but until then, I would love to connect with you on social media, I mostly hangout on Instagram, but you can find me on most platforms as @jamielcorbin and of course, I have more thoughts on the topic of allyship on the website, jamielcorbin.com.